



# Virginia's Guide for Parents of First-Year College Students

Your son or daughter is a first-year college student — what an exciting time! It is a mix of preparation and anticipation, excitement and apprehension. When students enter college, they are confronted with the opportunities and challenges of campus culture. This time represents a turning point in your relationship with your son or daughter. He or she will be away from home, perhaps for the first time. They may not admit it, but they feel insecure in a new social setting and want to fit in. Is your son or daughter prepared? You can be a big help in your student's successful transition to college life. This booklet provides you with up-to-date information that will help you talk with your son or daughter about underage drinking and for those of age, issues surrounding heavy drinking.

## Opportunities and Challenges

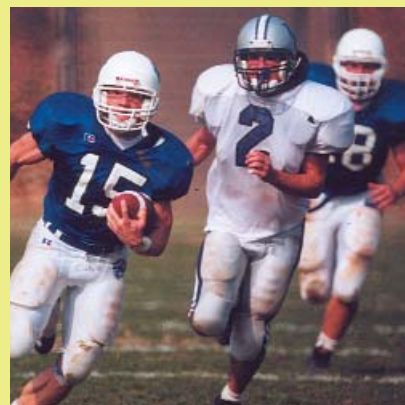
For many parents and young adults, bringing up the subject of alcohol is not easy. You may be unsure of when or how to begin and your student may try to dodge the conversation. However, it is important for you to be aware of the risks and consequences associated with alcohol so you can help your student be aware. Impaired judgment from drinking can lead to risky behavior causing academic, legal, and personal problems. It is important to understand the risks associated with drinking. For years, scare tactics have been used to try to curb risky behavior, but this strategy doesn't always work. It is much more effective for you to help your student understand that "not everyone is doing it." They should be aware that students across Virginia are developing positive behaviors concerning drinking.

## Currently in Virginia

The Commonwealth of Virginia has taken a strong stance to curb underage drinking and heavy drinking by college students. Virginia's current strategy encourages each college and university to develop or renew a foundational plan to reduce heavy and illegal drinking. This plan focuses on rebuilding or reviving campus culture to include personal responsibility, scholarship and citizenship, while educating students about health and safety hazards of alcohol and drugs, and vigorously enforcing the state's alcohol and drug laws on and off-campus. One very important piece of the recommendation is to empower parents to actively engage in discussion with their son or daughter about the legal and, for those of age, responsible use of alcohol. This booklet will help you learn about alcohol laws, penalties, dangers, intervention techniques and positive changes in the campus environment.

## Understanding the Facts

Students don't realize their fellow students actually drink less than they think. The 2002 Core Alcohol and Drug Survey\* shows the majority of students think less than half (26%) of Virginia college students are light drinkers — that is, they drink once a week, less than that



or not at all. Healthy choices are actually the norm in Virginia. The reality is that MOST Virginia college students (74%) drink once a week, less, or not at all and even more positive is that MOST (74%) includes 17.8% who do not drink at all!

- **Studies show that young people (ages 16-20) are more likely than any other age group to try to prevent their friends from drinking and driving.**
- **Almost 85% of students feel their close friends would disapprove or strongly disapprove of them having four or five drinks every day.**

It is important that your first-year student understand the facts and not rely on their perceptions alone. You can help your son or daughter understand that by being responsible and choosing not to drink they are in the majority, not the minority. Chances are they will make better decisions about drinking once they know the facts.

*\* (Based on survey data collected at 19 Virginia higher education institutions from a representative sample of 5,090 students – Spring 2002).*

## Alcohol and the Brain

Current research tells us that the brain is still developing until the early- to mid-20s, and regular and heavy drinking impairs learning and memory. Teens may not only affect their brain on a given night or weekend of drinking, but possibly for the rest of their life. Any of these long-lasting effects may reappear whenever the brain is stressed, not just when alcohol is present. Your son or daughter's adult personality could be altered permanently if he or she drinks heavily during adolescence. Serious brain damage is unlikely, but the difference could be that of a grade, pass or fail.

## The Law in Virginia

All states and the District of Columbia now have laws stating age 21 as the minimum age to purchase or drink alcohol. Virginia's Zero Tolerance law makes driving under the influence of any amount of alcohol or drugs a serious criminal offense.

Young adults (ages 18-20) caught buying, possessing or drinking alcohol can lose their drivers license for up to a year, be fined up to \$2,500 and face up to 12 months in jail.

Using a fake ID to buy alcohol means losing the right to drive for a year and a minimum fine of \$500.

A driver, age 20 or younger, with a blood alcohol level between .02 and .07 could lose their license for up to 6 months. Impaired driving begins with the first drink.

Knowing the law is important, but it is not enough. It takes a commitment to personal responsibility to remain safe and alcohol-free. Talk with your son or daughter about these issues before they head off to campus and continue talking with them while they are on campus.

## Here are some statistics that may surprise you:

- 64% of first-year students expressed at least some concern about alcohol use on campus.\*
- 68% of first-year students surveyed believe that people risk harming themselves if they engage in high-risk drinking (5+ drinks in one sitting).\*

Surprised? Your student might be too! Surveys show that students believe their fellow students are drinking far more than they actually are. Because they think there is more drinking going on than there really is, students may make drinking decisions based on their imaginary peers.

*\* 2002 Virginia Core Alcohol and Drug Survey*



At Virginia ABC, we are committed to being a driving force in alcohol prevention and responsible decision-making. We continually offer training and resources to the campus community of Virginia. If you'd like more information on our efforts, please visit our Web site for the most up-to-date information: [www.abc.state.va.us/education.html](http://www.abc.state.va.us/education.html) or e-mail us at: [education@abc.state.va.us](mailto:education@abc.state.va.us).



### Resources for You and Your First-year Student:

1. Virginia Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control: [www.abc.state.va.us](http://www.abc.state.va.us)
2. Higher Education Center: [www.edc.org/hec/](http://www.edc.org/hec/) or the Parent Connection: [www.edc.org/hec/parents/](http://www.edc.org/hec/parents/)
3. College Drinking: Changing the Culture: [www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov](http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov)
4. Facts on Tap: [www.factsonatap.org](http://www.factsonatap.org)
5. Adult Children of Alcoholics: [www.adultchildren.org](http://www.adultchildren.org)
6. Prevention Research Institute: [www.askpri.org](http://www.askpri.org)
7. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration: [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov)

8. Governor's Office for Substance Abuse Prevention: [www.gosap.state.va.us](http://www.gosap.state.va.us)
9. National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Info: [www.health.org](http://www.health.org)
10. Bacchus and Gamma Peer Education Network: [www.bacchusgamma.org](http://www.bacchusgamma.org)
11. The Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth: <http://camy.org>



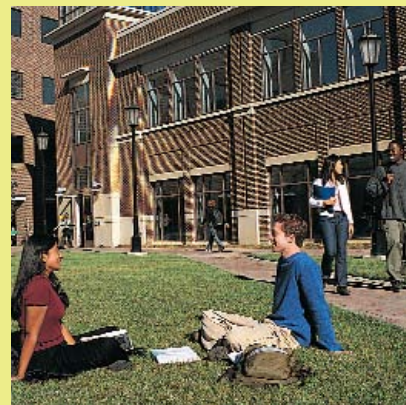
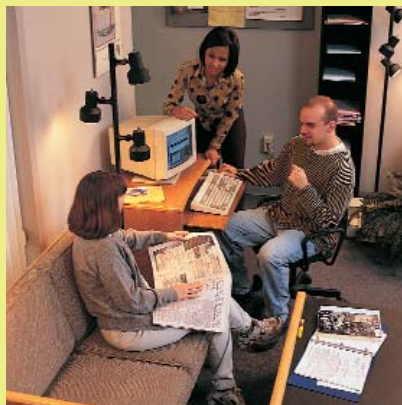
## Career Consequences

Young adults are held responsible for their decisions today. They need good information to make wise choices.

You are investing in your son or daughter's future by providing the information and support to help them make informed decisions.

While young adults who drink heavily may not realize their full academic potential, the effects of college drinking may reach beyond the classroom (absenteeism, low grades, etc.). Many companies routinely screen for drugs and alcohol before considering applicants for a job or internship. If a position has already been granted, the employer may withdraw the offer if a positive screening for drugs and/or alcohol is found.

More and more companies are also conducting background checks on potential employees. Graduates may be denied employment opportunities as a result of alcohol-related criminal convictions. Even acquittals may remain on their permanent record. The fact is, drinking by persons under the age of 21 is illegal, and may have serious short and long-term consequences.



## Parental Notification

Parental notification became law in 1998. Congress gave colleges and universities the green light to disclose alcohol or controlled substance violations to parents. These include violations of state and federal laws as well as school policies and rules governing the use or possession of alcohol or controlled substances.

Federal law recognizes a parent's right to be notified if their son or daughter is involved in risky or illegal behavior such as underage drinking, public drunkenness, drugs or criminal activity. The law permits, but does not require, schools to notify parents any time a student under 21 violates drug or alcohol laws.

As the parent or guardian of a first-year student, YOU should share this information with your son or daughter to help their college years be a safe and productive experience.

Check with the Dean of Students or Student Affairs office at your son or daughter's college to find out whether their school practices parental notification. Ask what circumstances routinely trigger notification. It may be possible for you to arrange to be notified in the event of an incident involving alcohol.



## Where to draw the line

### Communication

Show you care when you talk to your son or daughter. He/she is maturing and college will bring more freedom. Be direct when discussing drinking at school, as well as issues of safety, money, responsibility, life skills and academics. Along with expectations, it's important to discuss consequences. Students have a responsibility to their campus-community. Show your interest by continuing the dialog once he/she is on campus. You need to draw the line, but understand your son or daughter is growing up. Most of all, believe in your own power to help them avoid trouble:

- *Be a role model.*
- *Be factual and straightforward.*
- *Information is always the best defense.*
- *Avoid scare tactics.*
- *Correct misperceptions.*

It is important to talk with your son or daughter often. You do not need to cover every topic in one conversation. Lecturing will get you nowhere – providing information is the key. Show your interest often by continuing the dialog once he/she is on campus.

- **Expect the Best** – The college campus is a service-rich environment that can assist your son or daughter with study skills, leadership development, volunteerism, career resources and time management. Set expectations about class attendance, study time vs. free time, how you will keep in touch, healthy ways to relieve stress and issues surrounding the illegal use alcohol. For those of age, make sure they understand that it is easy to have fun at college without drinking.
- **Valuable Information** – Your family's values have never been more important than now. You may feel your student knows your family values, but it is a good idea to restate your values and expectations. Young adults rely heavily upon parental opinions and values. Your first-year student needs to know how to relate the values you have instilled to the choices he/she will be facing.
- **Priorities** – Set clear and realistic expectations regarding grades. Studies show that heavy drinking may contribute to a student's grades declining. If students are convinced their parents expect solid academic work, they are more likely to pay attention to their studies which will give them less time to get involved with drinking. Also, remind your son or daughter that he/she is responsible for sleeping habits, health, nutrition and sexuality. All things considered can have an impact on getting good grades.



- **More Means Less** – Alcohol is associated with missed classes and poor performance causing lower GPAs. The more drinks a student has each week, typically the lower the GPA. If you are concerned about poor grades, consider addressing study time and the possible use of alcohol with your son or daughter.
- **Safe and Secure** – Help your son or daughter understand their right to be safe. Others who do drink can affect students who do not drink. This can cause problems like interrupted study time, assault or unwanted sexual advances. Students should discuss the problem with the offender when possible. If that fails, they should ask campus staff for help by contacting the counseling center, residence assistant, academic advisor, student health, or campus police/security.
- **Don't Tell Tales** – Your son or daughter may interpret stories of drinking during college as approving of dangerous alcohol consumption. Be honest when asked, but avoid glamorizing high-risk use.
- **Common Sense** – Make sure your student understands that alcohol can be toxic and alcohol poisoning can kill. Ask your son or daughter to have the common sense and self-confidence to intervene when they see someone risking their life by drinking dangerously.
- **Volunteering** – Encourage your student to volunteer in the community. It helps structure free time, and provides students with a broader outlook and a healthier respect for their lives. Students may contact the Student Affairs Office on campus for information on volunteering opportunities.
- **Making It Clear** – Underage drinking and alcohol impaired driving are against the law. You should openly tell your son or daughter you disapprove of underage drinking, dangerous alcohol consumption, driving while under the influence of alcohol and riding in the car with an impaired driver.
- **Non-Alcohol Centered Events** – Events centered on fun are more frequent at colleges than in the past years. Service learning trips are becoming increasingly popular alternatives to the traditional spring and fall break programs. Students can contact the Student Affairs Office on campus for information on programs and how to get involved in planning them.
- **DWYSYWD** – (Do What You Say You Will Do) Help your son or daughter think through ways they will handle certain situations before they face them on campus and teach them DWYSYWD. You can help them prepare successfully for the unexpected.



Communicate with your student in new ways — be a better listener, ask questions, and try not to react in a way that will shut down the conversation. It's important to know and understand the campus culture. Talk to your son or daughter about his/her beliefs on how much drinking occurs on campus. If your student says things that challenge you, try not to react harshly and explain you want to prepare them for a good college experience. Be prepared to correct any misperceptions. Invite a discussion and avoid lecturing. Talk to your son or daughter at a time and place for an easy give-and-take of ideas. Make sure they understand you recognize them as young adults.

This is an exciting time for your son or daughter. And in the end, the choices about drinking are theirs to make. It will be their responsibility—not the responsibility of the people at a party, the fraternity, roommates or friends. You have a large role in preparing your son or daughter to make responsible choices. Often, students make choices without thinking how those choices will affect them later. By sharing the information in this brochure beforehand, you help them make responsible choices. While you may not be able to actively monitor your student away from home, you can be available to talk and listen. You're shaping your son or daughter's character, and you may be saving your child's life.

**Most college students  
make responsible decisions  
about the use of alcohol.  
But balancing these new  
experiences can be difficult.**

**Availability of Alcohol +  
Lack of Parental Influence +  
Desire to fit in =**

**Possible Negative Outcomes**



*Photography provided by University of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, Washington & Lee University, James Madison University, George Mason University.*



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Please take a moment to fill out the quick response card below and fax to (804) 213-4457 or tear out and mail to the address provided on the back of this form. You may also provide us feedback by email at [education@abc.state.va.us](mailto:education@abc.state.va.us)

## How did you receive this booklet?

- ☐ From my son/daughter's college
- ☐ From a high school counselor
- ☐ From a special event (fair etc.)
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

## Did you find this booklet helpful?

- ☐ Yes, very helpful
- ☐ Somewhat helpful
- ☐ No, not helpful at all
- ☐ Other comments \_\_\_\_\_

## After receiving this booklet, have you taken the time to talk with your son or daughter?

- ☐ Yes      How? \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ No      Why? \_\_\_\_\_

## Do you plan to use any of the Internet resources listed?

- ☐ Yes      Which ones? \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ No      Why not? \_\_\_\_\_

## Is there any information missing that would have been helpful to you?

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## Other Comments/Suggestions:

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Virginia ABC, Education Section  
PO Box 27491  
Richmond, Virginia 23261-7491

Place  
Stamp  
Here

Virginia Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control  
Education Section  
PO Box 27491  
Richmond, Virginia 23261-7491

▲ Please fold along dotted line, seal open edge with clear tape, add postage and mail. ▲



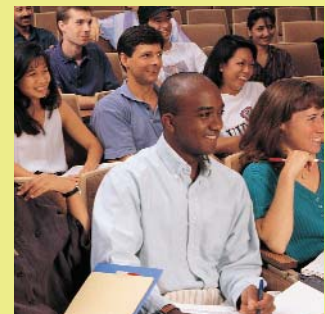
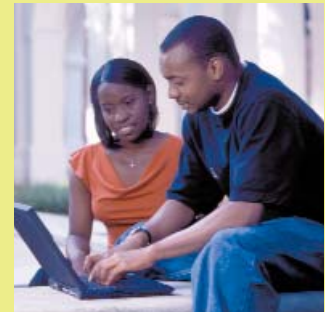
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- Attorney General's Report by the Task Force on Drinking by College Students Commonwealth of Virginia – 1998 ([www.oag.state.va.us](http://www.oag.state.va.us) )
- Campus Connections Be Social & Sober, Be Successful, Michigan Department of Community Health
- College Parents of America Outlines Eight Points for Parents Speaking With Students About Alcohol, The Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention ([www.edc.org/hec](http://www.edc.org/hec) )
- College Talk – A Parent's Guide on Talking to Your College-Bound Student About Drinking, 2000, Anheuser-Busch, Inc., St. Louis, MO. BCS Item 1015268. ([beerresponsible.com](http://beerresponsible.com))
- The Hartford Courant, 3/15/2000, "Binge Drinking on the Rise at Campuses" by Robert A. Frahm
- Just The Facts Brochure – Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control, 2002
- Make a Difference Talk to Your Child about Alcohol, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Parenting Skills: 21 Tips and Ideas to Help You Make a Difference, The National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (a service of SAMHSA)
- DWYSYWD: Do what you say you will do, page 3, "The Peer Educator", February 2000
- Web site: [www.beerboozebooks.com/books.htm](http://www.beerboozebooks.com/books.htm). Prevention Primer: College and University Students: [www.health.or/pubs/primer/college.htm](http://www.health.or/pubs/primer/college.htm)
- Wechsler, H., & Wuethrich, B. (2002). Dying to Drink: Confronting Binge Drinking on College Campuses. USA: Rodale.
- The 2002 Core Alcohol and Drug Survey (Virginia Dept. of ABC) funded by the Governor's Office on Safe and Drug-Free Schools. Included 19 public and private colleges and universities and nearly 5,090 respondents.
- The Parent Connection on the HEC Web site: [www.edc.org/hec/parents/](http://www.edc.org/hec/parents/)

*Funding for the development and printing of this booklet was made possible through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education.*



**The Education Section of the Virginia Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control developed this resource. Phone: (804) 213-4688.**  
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